DRESSING GOWNS AND GLUE

LANCE SIEVEKING

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DRESSING GOWNS AND GLUE



Where is Arabella ?

THIRD EDITION

DRESSING GOWNS AND GLUE

By

Capt. L. de G. Sieveking, D.S.C.

Author of "Gladstone Bags and Marmalade."

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

JOHN NASH



With an Introduction about the Verses by G. K Chesterton
And an Introduction about the Drawings by Max Beerbohm
And something about all concerned by Cecil Palmer

EDITED BY PAUL NASH

CECIL PALMER

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Introduction

THEY have asked me to write an introduction to this book. And I have said to myself it shall be a serious affair. Hemmed in by fantastic flowers of folly shall be discovered my weed of sense. I will be heard a croaking cuckoo in this nest of blithe linnets. I will be the lump of dough impervious to this obstreperous leaven.

So I have cast my introduction in the form of " vers libre," for that is the form in which it is most likely to be taken seriously.

"Had it not been for Me."

Had it not been for me this book might never have appeared.
Not that I have done any hard work ;
My business has been to make other people do things
Which, left to themselves, they would never have done.
Had it not been for me this book might never have appeared.
That is why I am not giving you my address.*

PAUL NASH

*Mr. Cecil Palmer also has his instructions regarding those who write to tell him about these three split infinitives.

About the Poems

I FEEL it is fun to append a paragraph of prose to the poems of my friend, Captain Sieveking, of the Royal Air Force ; though I am conscious of being a rather heavy object, in every sense, to attach to so very airy an aeroplane. It does not surprise me to find him either a flying-man or a fantastic versifier ; for, having known him since he was a boy, I remember that he was always the sort of boy whom one expected every minute to climb the string after his own kite. And it is a quaint example of that evolution, and shows with how recent and rapid a rush the strange birds of science have swept across the sky, that even so short a time ago the image I use was alone approximate to aviation ; and a child's kite the thing closest to the clouds. Even now, at any rate, the poet is not, like some poets, only interested in the clouds, and lost to all interests in the kites. He will not complain of the infantile comparison in connection with these pages ; for a book is very like a kite, being made of paper and sent out at a venture ; and we need not complain of the suggestion that much of the paper made into books had better have been made into kites. But if this be true of much literature, it is most true of serious, and especially scientific, literature. I do not feel it about poetry, and least of all about preposterous poetry. And if this is a kite, it can also claim to be a child's kite, something as nonsensical as a nursery rhyme, and belonging to the high topsy-turvydom of the sky.

It is nonsensical to introduce nonsense poetry with a foreword ; that is one of the reasons why I am only too delighted to do it. Obviously the foreword should be called a hind-before-word, and ought to appear at the end ; or better still, in the middle, and preferably printed upside down. But it is on the whole fortunate that fantastic poets are not invariably subserved by fantastic publishers, or even by fantastic printers ; though printers sometimes do seem caught in a wind from fairyland ; as if the proverbial printer's devil could be

more kindly interpreted as a printer's elf. Anyhow, I repeat, it is absurd to write a foreword to a fancy ; but then, as will be ultimately apparent to a reflective mind, it is absurd to write a foreword to anything. I am far from certain that it is not absurd to write at all ; but I am absolutely and rigidly certain that it is least absurd to write absurdities. Some complain of men making us listen to their follies ; but it is men making us listen to their wisdom which, in the words of Wordsworth (not himself perhaps a wholly nonsensical poet), has oftener left me mourning. I think the preference ethically and theologically defensible ; for there is really more pride in propounding philosophy than in propounding frivolity. And though the author of this book has another and more active side of his existence, connected with recent events that have been not only serious but tragic, I would not spoil his literary holiday in these pages, by taking those serious things too seriously here. I am sure he enjoys writing these rhymes, as I certainly enjoy reading them ; and he has earned it by experiences exceedingly remote from enjoyment. It is enough to say, in the spirit of this idle scrawl, that my friend the poet has just come out of prison. He did not go there as a forger, or even as a burglar, though he certainly possesses all the virtues which are too seldom saluted in the last profession. He went to prison as a Conscientious Objector to the invasion of Belgium. It may be necessary to explain that it was a German prison ; and he was put there to punish him for killing German subjects, probably professors, with the assistance of a flying-machine. And if the earnest reader will turn to the page of verse entitled " Charm Against Fright," he will learn by what process my friend was enabled to get the D.S.C. ; and how it is possible to achieve this by twisting the toes and saying the alphabet backwards. So we come to the romance of reversal once more ; and the reader may be assured that if he reads this short preface backwards, it will sound quite as well.

G. K. CHESTERTON

About the Drawings

TO be asked to write a preface, or a foreword, or (as the invitation more often and more subtly puts it) just a few words, is an experience that always alarms me. Not that I at all resent the hint that I am grown old; nor that I fail in gratitude for the implication that I have still got my faculties about me. No; the reason why I am generally at pains to excuse myself from complying is that among the "few words" that occur to me as sayable there are five which, though I don't want to say them, I always foresee myself inevitably saying at the very outset: Good wine needs no bush.

This would not matter if we were living in past days. Before the final decade of the Victorian Era the prefatorialists, the foreworders, the men of few words, were not afraid to say trite things. But now one feels oneself in duty bound to be startling. There are so many of us writers, and the pace of the whole mundane movement is so fast, that how can any one of us hope to catch and, even for a moment, hold your attention but by saying some brand-new thing in some brand-new way? I know that if I led off with an old saw I should be trampled under foot, unheeded in your wild rush onward to something else. And yet, how on earth can I help saying—

Courage! Self-consciousness to the winds! Let me fix my thoughts on John Nash. I wonder what he is like. I have never seen him. I know that he is a landscape painter, that he is young, that he was till lately a soldier in France, that he is Paul Nash's brother. An image of him begins to form itself in my mind. But this image dissolves quickly when I look at these pen-and-ink drawings of his. It dissolves in laughter. And I recall that in my youth there was a music hall singer famous for his "laughing songs." He was a large, stout man, with an opera hat under his arm, and with an enormous shirt-front that had a proportionately enormous diamond stud in it; and he could hardly sing, so convulsed was he (as were

we, too) with laughter ; and the name he bore, on the programmes and on the posters, was Jolly John Nash. Intuition is no match for memory. I find myself helplessly crediting John Nash, artist, with the huge semblance of that old artiste, that previous great spreader of mirth. The remembered rays of the diamond stud dazzle me even now, and I am not sure, so confused am I, that they don't proceed from the breast of the young man whose work is my theme. To him I apologise hastily. No doubt he is the modest wearer of two or three small pearls. I daresay even that he is not jolly. The twinkling eye, the twitching lip, the great hearty laugh that has a marked effect on the welkin—such things, I have found, are rather rare among humorous artists. In themselves, these men tend to be solemn. Young John Nash may, for aught I know, be a perennial fount of gloom to his intimates. If so, he atones, assuredly, to the utmost, when he takes pen in hand.

That a comic drawing should itself be comic seems to be a reasonable demand. Yet it is a demand which few comic draughtsmen meet. Comic drawings, for the most part, are but comic ideas seriously illustrated. We are shown an angry man who has just missed his stroke at golf ; near him, a caddie grinning behind his hand ; and a view of the golf-links. Admirable ! The man's stockings and knickerbockers, his cap, his collar and tie, are so rendered that a tailor or hosier would not blush to sign them. The drawing of the caddie's fingers would satisfy any drawing-master in any municipal art school. The treatment of the golf-links is faithful, sensitive, reverent. But—where does the fun come in ? Through the text beneath, maybe. But only for a moment. Out it goes, arrested, in the grip of the artist's firm and laborious hand.

Even in serious art the sense of labour should not be obtruded on us. In comic art it is fatal. Lightness, an air of take-it-or-leave-it spontaneity, is needed to conserve fun. Nor is this all. A light, cursory method is not inconsistent with realism. It may suggest men and things rather precisely as they are. That is not fatal ; but it is undesirable. What we want, and what John Nash very signally has, is a light

method that is extravagant, that is absurd, a method ancillary to a vision of the world not as (at an earnest glance) the world is, but as, for two pins, one fine morning, it just might be, insomuch that the absurdities inherent in even the best of us could no longer be hushed up.

I am tempted to dilate, in technical terms, on the skill of workmanship that underlies the simplicity of these drawings. But I do not wish to break a butterfly on a wheel. Besides, I feel that good wi——

There ! I all but said it.

MAX BEERBOHM

Now, Barabbas was a Publisher!

IT is extremely annoying that I cannot, and it would be very jolly if I could, publish this book without the necessity of producing it. It would be wild fun to share the joy of the readers who purchased the book they would never see and listen to the gusty praises of those who had never read it. The possibilities are infinite. For instance, a man would be able for the first time to tell the truth. He would remark on the cleverness of "Dressing Gowns and Glue" by exclaiming on the wild extravagances and sheer abandon of the verses he had never read, and the exquisite charm of the drawings he had never seen. This would be an innovation so far as readers of books are concerned, although, to give the devil his due, I am bound to confess that the experience is a common one amongst critics. Then again it would be possible to add a few more forewords, prefaces and introductions. Mr. Chesterton has let himself go about the verses. Mr. Max Beerbohm has gone off the deep end about the drawings. Mr. Paul Nash has justified his claim to be a perfect working man by finding work for everybody but himself. The author has done his best and the artist his worst. In the circumstances it would be poetic justice if a representative of the general public were allowed to give a bit of his mind for the delectation of the criminals. I tremble to think what might happen if a delegate of the booksellers were invited to contribute. He would doubtlessly complain that the publisher was a dirty dog for sending him invoices for a book he had never seen, but he would, I suppose, observe a discreet silence about the Bradburys he pocketed from the customers who bought the book that didn't exist. I was going to add that it would be nice to have a few words from the printer, but I refrain, for that gentleman would oblige too willingly and charge me an extra few pounds for the composition.

In introducing Capt. Sieveking, John Nash, G. K. Chesterton, Max Beerbohm and Paul Nash, hereinafter referred to as

the criminals, I, as the receiver of the "swag," may perhaps be permitted a brief word about each of them. Capt. Sieveking is as tall as his stories. John Nash is obviously a born comedian, since "his face in repose" reminds me of Bairnsfather's "Old Bill" buried up to the eyebrows in the *débris* of a shell hole. The grand thing about Mr. Chesterton is, that he is a bridge and not a goal, a bridge slung across an abyss between the sublime and the ridiculous. Mr. Max Beerbohm I have never met in the flesh, but as he lives at Hampstead I don't see that I can be blamed for that. I know nothing of his personal appearance, so he must be the man of mystery as I have no doubt he is. Mr. Paul Nash wears charming trousers, and is one of those nasty men whom one occasionally meets who insists on keeping one up to the scratch.

CECIL PALMER

Read aloud in sing-song

Folk-Song

I

Corn-cobs, artichokes, cabbages and tea!
Where is Arabella—Tell me where is she?
I sought her in the dustbin, I sought her on the roof,
And that she's not abducted I have no sort of proof.
I saw her last on Tuesday night drinking from a spoon
And now for all I know she may be sleeping in the Moon!

Chorus.

Corn-cobs, artichokes, cabbages and tea!
Bother Arabella! Wherever *can* she be?

II

Peppermint and Gollywogs, elm-trees and ink!
Arabella's gone away and I shall take to drink.
I sought her at The George's Head, I went and asked the Queen,
They both suggested Leicester Square, but she had not been seen!
I saw her last in '91 bathing in the Seine.
Surely this is quite enough to turn my muddled brain!

Chorus.

Peppermint and Gollywogs, elm-trees and ink!
I think I'll go and drown myself in Arabella's sink!



I went and asked the Queen.

III

Overcoats and motor-cars, aeroplanes and bread!
Arabella's gone away, I wonder if she's dead?
I sought her in the city streets, I sought her out to sea,
I consulted dogs and sparrows, and I asked a bumble bee!
I saw her last in Tara's Halls playing on a harp—
And I think that I shall advertise in the "Exchange and Mart."

Chorus.

Overcoats and motor-cars, aeroplanes and bread!
But I never thought of looking under Arabella's bed!

IV

Gladstone-bags and marmalade, dressing-gowns and glue!
Arabella's up the spout—whatever shall I do?
I sought her in Trafalgar Square, I went and asked the Bank,
And every time they didn't know, my mind became a blank.
I saw her last in New South Wales, playing penny nap—
When I found her, all the mice were dancing round her in the trap!

Chorus.

Gladstone-bags and marmalade, dressing-gowns and glue!
The mice had eaten all the cheese and Arabella too!



I consulted Dogs and Sparrows.

A Morning's Work

I

With a shout and a yell and a terrible roar
I rushed down Regent Street!
And I marked up a sign on every door
The Sign of the Twisted Feet!
That every 'bus and taxi-cab, pantechnicon and dray
And bicyclist and tricyclist might start back in dismay
And call upon the unknown god and blink their eyes and pray
That he should leave the thing unsaid
And let them go their way,
Nor cause a flash to strike them dead!
Until some other day—
 Say Thursday next!

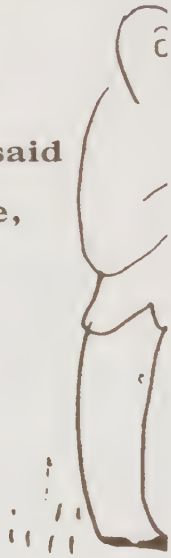
II

With a laugh and a shriek and a fiendish yell
I rushed up Regent Street!
And I rubbed out the sign and rang the bell,
The Sign of The Twisted Feet!
That every shop and pillar-box, advertisement and train
And wheelbarrow and Policeman might find their faith again,
Nor miss the awful warning of the Twisted Feet of Pain!
And as the dawn was rising red
With wet and drizzling rain,
I went straight home and so to bed
With bubbles in my brain,
 And that was *that*!

The Old, Old Man

I said to him
" You old, old man
You make me feel that I was born to-day !
You with your old, old wrinkled face and grey—
Say—when the world began,
Were *you* there, standing on a hill
Watching the earth—the slowly cooling fire
The boiling lava with its golden mire ?
And with a sudden thrill
Saw you the first small struggling spark
Of Life ? And when the first day's fading light
Blended the shadows of the world's first night,
Rose the moon from the dark ?

You tell me that you knew no fear
In the awful winter of Crimea !
That there was laughter in your heart
When people mentioned Bonaparte,
When Nelson stormed New York, you said
Old Lincoln wished that he were dead.
And have you ever cheered Queen Anne,
You old, old man ? "



November 19th, 1918.

Charm Against Fright

When I am frightened by bogies or spooks
Or Things that go flop in the night,
Or Things that start hooting like peacocks or rooks
Or when I've been reading sensational books
And something goes wrong with the light—
Then I try to keep cool and collected and calm,
To avoid at all costs going mad!
And I find that the use of this family charm
Is the best antidote to be had!

By reciting the alphabet backwards,
And tying my toes into knots,
And holding my breath for ten minutes,
And thinking of millions of dots—
And knitting my eyebrows with needles
It produces a soothing effect . . .
And you haven't got time to be frightened!
You've heard of this way, I expect?

Tono-Witchcraft

A chemist whom I know
When asked said " Time will show,
They'll sell like cakes upon All-Hallows E'en."
This referred somewhat obscurely
To his bottles, famous surely
Of Holococle-Chloromethidene.

In bottles large and square,
Which conspicuously bear
On labels of a nasty acid green
This long impressive name,
Which my friend could not explain,
" The Holococle-Chloromethidene."

" I could not find a surer
Panacea than aqua pura
For all the ills mankind has ever seen,"
Said my chemist as I cried :
" How have you justified
Your Holococle-Chloromethidene ? "

He said : " You buy a box
At a bob or so, approx.
Of paints, and by judicious use of steam
You admix with them some water,
And thus produce a sort ' a '
Mild Holococle-Chloromethidene.

" But the best sort has a taste
As of oily cotton waste,
And I pride myself I'm hardly ever mean ;
So I make it mellow pink,
That is suitable I think
For Holococle-Chloromethidene.

" The directions on the label
Tell you that it is able
To cure warts, blackheads, scabies, gout and spleen.
I maintain that this is true,
If with faith you drink a brew
Of Holococle-Chloromethidene ! "

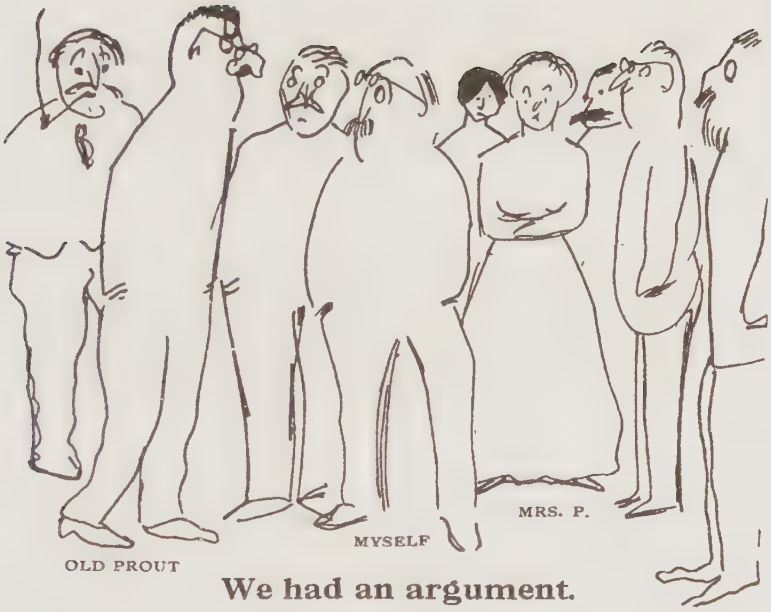
But he found it did not pay
To describe it in this way,
Because some men were worse than they had been
After drinking several doses
(And without skilled diagnoses !)
Of Holococle-Chloromethidene.

So he slightly changed its uses,
Thus preventing these abuses—
And made it cure affections unforeseen ;
" If their pains are *very* bad,
Think what they *might* have had
But for Holococle-Chloromethidene ! "

Karlsruhe, November 17th.



Some men were worse than they had been.



We had an argument.

An Important Scientific Discovery

I

We had an argument—we three,
Old Prout, myself and Mrs. P.,
 About the Earth. They said they found
That it was flat as flat could be,
 I said that it was round.

II

He demonstrated on the floor
A method weirdly strange—obscure ;
 In the hall he placed a pot,
Said I could see it through the door,
 I said that I could not.

III

Mrs. P. quoted a man
Who said the way that horses ran
 Confuting gravitational force,
Proved as finally as one can
 The earth was flat—of course !

IV

That night a " Being " from above
Roused me from slumber with a shove,
 And by some supernatural might
Gave me wings like a morning dove,
 And whirled me into night.

V

We landed on a planet which
Began to twinkle—toss and pitch :
 The Earth looked very small and far ;
(I wasn't certain which was which
 So like the planets are !)

VI

But one thing certain I saw then
About the little world of men ;
 That it is neither round nor flat,
But it has star-spikes numb'ring ten
(Prout hasn't the brains of a hen !)
 I'm sure of that !

Clausthal, May 10th.

EXAMPLES OF
BLATANT NAUGHTINESS



Blatant Naughtiness. Examples of


L·C·C·

"Examples of Blatant Naughtiness"

EXAMPLE I

There was once a charwoman of Amsterdam
Who went sailing away to sea
On the top of a powerful electric tram
That she stole from the L.C.C.
With a bee in her bonnet,
A cuckoo-clock on it,
And ninety-nine packets of Tea!
In a fit of contrition
She cut the ignition,
And flew away home on the back of a bee,
Shouting, "Hey-Ho! Fiddle-de-dee!
What's the use of work?"

EXAMPLE II

There was a plain spinster of
Marlebone
Slid down the dome of St.
Paul's.
One after another the gargoyles
of stone
Broke every one of her falls !





She stood up and recited,
The crowd was delighted !
They showered her with saw-
dust and balls !
Without hesitating
She jumped down a grating
And joined in the midst of the
riots and brawls—
Crying, " Tj-a-jyjy and pig in
a hall !
A hoot and a toot, Mrs.
Grundy ! "

EXAMPLE III

There was once an old soldier of Dover Fort
Jumped over the harbour pier :
And the way that his features he used to contort
Turned the dreadnoughts green with fear !
For his eyes and his nose
Got mixed up with his toes
And were twisted behind his ear.
One day, with a flannel
He mopped up the channel
And shrieked with delight when the ships couldn't steer,
Shouting " Hoity-toity ! Skittles and beer !
A fig for the silly old army ! "



The Sad Tale of the Ambitious Engine

I

One wild and stormy night in June
Under the stars and a silver moon,
An engine began to whistle a tune
 By the bridge at Scarboro'.
The tune was melancholy and mad,
It's plaintive whistling burthen sad
Was : that it never, never had
 Been to Market Harboro'.

II

" In all my life I've had no luck !
When I was a baby porter's-truck
I was ever full of life and buck
 And reckless high ambition—
For me the sunlight never shines,
My soul for other junctions pines !
I might perhaps run off the lines
 In my desolate condition ! "

III

And suddenly an inspiration
Came amid this meditation.
With a cautious glance towards the station
 It quickly got up steam ;
Then, silent as a hunted fox,
It crept towards the signal box
And pushed one of the lever locks
 To realize its dream !

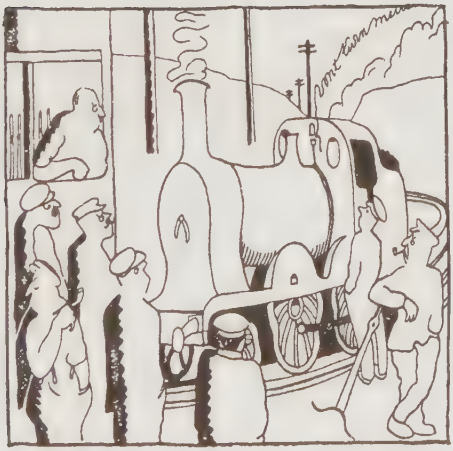
IV

Then, as the points clicked back across,
It let loose all its speed and force,
And fled like a wild and flying horse
 Into the raging storm.
On, on it went, its pace unslackened,
Past the banks all flowered and brackened ;
Till it stopped all wet and blackened
 In the wintry dawn.

V

They found it later in the day ;
It hardly had the breath to say :
It knew that it would have to pay—
So it sadly grunted :
" Turn me into a Trippers' Train,
Or a slow express on the Up Line Main !
But say not I have puffed in vain !
And let me not be shunted ! "

October 14th.



On Choosing a Career

Read aloud as fast as you possibly can, without pause for breath

I

I shall build a little house of bluebottles' wings
Slow With a penwiper for the door,
And I shall sit there for ever—thinking of things
And writing them on the floor. . . .

II

Of course I know I might start a new magazine
Cresc. Or build a magnificent tunnel,
Or go raving mad and pour boiling benzine
Into the Strand through a funnel!

Allegretto. III

Or start a society for Utter Prevention,
Or invent a new evening dress,
Or collect a large fund for presenting a pension
To burglars in distress!



A Society for Utter Prevention.

Allegretto Vivace! IV

Again—I might form a Republic in Surrey,
And make myself President " One,"
Or discover a new kind of Japanese curry,
And have the most glorious fun !

V

I might climb to the top of the old Eiffel Tower,
And throw buns at the roof of Notre Dame !
Or board an express and show Intellect's Power—
By pulling the danger alarm !

VI

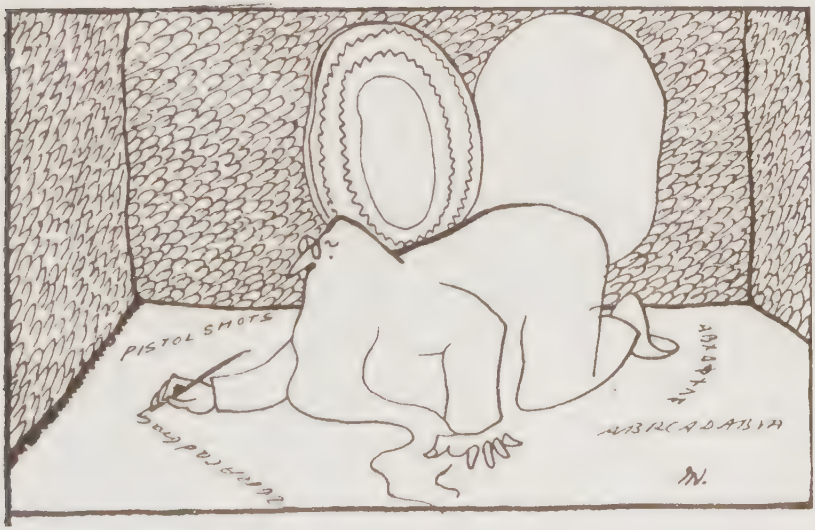
I might start out on travels—a modern Globe-trotter,
Rall. And re-discover North Wales !
Or paint all the fish in the sea Terra-cotta,
And tie little flags to their tails !

But *no!*

VII

I shall build a little house of bluebottles' wings
With a penwiper for the door—
And I shall sit there for ever—thinking of things
And writing them on the floor ! . . .

October 27th.



It Looked Like

I

It looked like a rug or a bunch of flowers,
Or a pie or a garden gate ;
But I waited there for hours and hours—
The moon itself was late.
It looked like an old and sleeveless coat,
Or a cheap edition of songs ;
But they all came marching up the moat
Beating a thousand gongs.

II

It looked like a blackened crag of stone,
Or a tired and worn-out joke ;
But I scratched my cheek with my collar-bone
And caused the stars to choke.
It looked like a bad mistake in print,
Or a home that has fallen down ;
But a brass bell rang with a greenish glint,
And the swallow's song turned brown.



Idle Curiosity

"Whither and whence and how and why?"
Cried Nelson, bending from the sky.
"Unceasing rush and hurry and fuss!"
Said Nelson to a motor 'bus.
The driver goggled wildly round;
The length of Whitehall held no sound.
London gave one shivering stare,
Then London left Trafalgar Square.
People jumped and squirmed and fell,
And beetled up Pall Mall pell-mell.

* * * * *

"I simply cannot understand,"
Said Nelson, glancing up the Strand.

Cranks

Mr. Ouja Capel
Was far from well.
Somehow his mission
Against Superstition
Was not being blessed with success.
In the depths of his mind
He dug down to find
A condemning indictment relative to dress
Or umbrellas or ladders
Or bites of green adders
Or anything else like a proof—more or less
That civilisation
Was mere aberration
And only a catchword, a snare, and a hoax !
" If people believe all
These things mediæval
They're not far removed from green artichokes !
There's no heaven or hell ! "
Shouted Ouja Capel,
" That's only a legend like Grimm's.
Than March Hares you're madder !
I walked 'neath a ladder
And broke thirteen mirrors in Pyms !
You would have said
I ought to be dead—
So did Pyms. But by simple addition
They made up a bill
That I paid at the till
And laughed at your weak superstition ! "



A good use for this book at this point,

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